

# Congress of the United States

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 10, 2023

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Over the past several weeks, residents of Utah have seen passport processing grind to a near halt, greatly disrupting travel plans and other aspects of daily life in our state. We have reached the point where our offices are struggling to handle all incoming emergency requests due to the sheer volume of requests we are receiving. This is an acute problem, and we ask that you take every step possible to address it, including by opening a passport agency in Salt Lake City.

We fully recognize it is the State Department's goal to provide timely, accessible passport services for all citizens. However, constituent requests for assistance with emergency passport renewals have significantly increased in recent weeks, overwhelming congressional caseworkers. The lack of same-day service via a Utah-based passport agency severely exacerbates this urgent and growing problem.

We also appreciate the State Department's recognition of this challenge and its acknowledgment of the need to provide additional resources. We welcome the department's recent announcement that in response to "unprecedented passport demand," it is deploying more staff, utilizing more overtime and opening "a satellite office." These are all positive steps, but more must be done. These disruptions to our passport system are no longer special occurrences or tied to unique or emergency situations; the passport system is currently failing to keep up with normal demand for spring and summer travel plans.

In Utah, our casework officers consistently encounter operational failures at State Department passport offices and agencies. Constituents are reporting that they are placed on hold by passport offices for hours before calls inexplicably drop. Constituents who do get through are being given incorrect information over the phone, such as being told they cannot upgrade to overnight shipping or expedited services. Requests for standard in-person appointments are ignored. Processing times are extended without notification to

constituents. Despite skyrocketing demand, online passport processing programs have also failed to meet demand or provide appropriate, timely service. These failures and inefficiencies result in a flood of requests to congressional caseworkers, who then spend hours on hold themselves. As we are certain you agree, this is simply unacceptable.

Perhaps most frustrating, any in-person services for Utahns requires them to travel long distances out of state. We continue to urge the State Department to improve access to in-person passport services for Utahns and the Western Mountain region. Last year, legislation to address this issue became law in the FY23 National Defense Authorization Act. It requires the Secretary of State to review the geographic diversity of passport agencies to identify areas of the country with both high demand and no in-person access, and further requires the Secretary to announce a strategy for ensuring accessibility of in-person passport services for large population centers, rural areas, and States with high demand.

Critically, the legislation also affirms that State Department initiatives to expand passport services and accessibility, including through online modernization projects, should include the construction of new physical passport agencies. Our constituents are best served by having in-person options available to expeditiously renew their passports.

Salt Lake County meets the criteria in the legislation, and we implore you to prioritize resources and investment to meet the consular needs of citizens within and near this region.

We renew our request that you open a passport agency in Salt Lake City to give Mountain West residents an in-person option for passport services. Not only would this be consistent with your statutory obligations, but it would provide significant relief to residents of several states.

On behalf of all Utahns struggling to receive emergency passport assistance, we look forward to reviewing your strategy for ensuring in-person passport service accessibility as required by law.

Sincerely,



Mitt Romney  
United States Senator



Michael S. Lee  
United States Senator

